SPECTRUM

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THE TEXT HERE PRINTED
BY PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR
HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM
THE ART OF PRINTING
BY
STANLEY MORISON

INSET TO THE PENROSE ANNUAL 1954

A WELL-KNOWN PASSAGE FROM THE MEMOIRS OF VESPASIANO DA BISTICCI, THE FLORENTINE BOOKSELLER, TELLS how Federigo, Duke of Urbino, having built a library at the expense of 30,000 ducats, bound every volume in scarlet and silver. Vespasiano described the library as a rich and magnificent sight. No book was imperfect; all were written on vellum and all beautifully illuminated. Vespasiano then tells us that 'in this library all the books were superlatively good and written with the pen'; and, he affirms, 'had there been one printed book, it would have been ashamed in such company'.

The Duke and his bookseller held that books so made had no place in a fine library. This was written in 1490 or so; there are not lacking to-day those who hold a similar view. The printer's work was, and is, denied consideration as an aspect of art by collectors of known taste and discrimination. Naturally, when told, as we commonly are told, that printers 'followed in the trail of the calligraphers'; and that 'their letter-forms were all taken over from the makers of hand-written books', we prefer the real thing, the manuscript, made by the scribe, to the imitation, made by the printer.

It would thus appear just to regard printing as a sort of poor relation of calligraphy. It looks like writing; it clearly is not writing; therefore it is imitation writing. No imitation, as such, can possess any sort of artistic value. Thus, the subject upon which I have been asked to lecture to-day is easily disposed of, and there remains little excuse for my further detaining this audience.

Nevertheless, if one of my hearers should be so disputatious as to ask the question 'What exactly was, and is, printing?' the matter might appear less simple. What we think of printing must depend upon the *properties and purposes that are peculiar to it. We can discover these by first separating printing from, and then comparing it with other productions made to be read. The comparison needs to be strictly made according to the analogy of the form and of the*

MATTER OF THE THINGS COMPARED. IF PRINTING MAY BE PROVISIONALLY DEFINED AS 'SOMETHING TO READ', BASED UPON alphabetical signs, its form becomes comparable, to a certain extent, with applications of the same alphabet to all other sorts of material. Thus, the question, what alphabetical form, if any, is peculiar to printing, resolves itself into a palaeographical inquiry.

The primary critical consideration, then, to be given to printing derives from the science that organizes our knowledge of alphabetical symbols in every stage of their evolution, and in every medium of their production: whether cut, painted, stamped, or written on stone, clay, metal, papyrus, vellum, or paper. Knowledge of the materials, tools, symbols, signs, abbreviations, and techniques employed by the writers, carvers, scribes, notaries, and calligraphers of the past, is essential to our inquiry; the nature–and hence, the artistic value, if any–of that specific application of the alphabet known as printing.

Palaeography developed as a science after the publication in 1685 of Dom Mabillon's methodical digest of the scripts, materials, and techniques used in the composition of Latin documents. The application of the analytical method to inscriptions, though begun by Marini in 1795, did not become scientific until Mommsen, with the help of the Berlin Academy, anticipating similar efforts in France, initiated the *Corpus* in 1863. By 1885, when Hübner published his *Exempla Scripturae Epigraphicae,* it was certain that, as the inscriptions were regarded by philologists and historians as of first-rate interest, this department would quickly become an independent study. Thus, 'epigraphy' was separated.

The science has suffered other subdivisions. Historians quickly saw how its methods served the study of constitutional and administrative history. Following Theodor von Sickel's *Monumenta Graphica Medii Aevi* (1878), the study of shapes, sizes, and formats of charters, the formulas and scripts used for agreements and other indentures, was separated. So, too, the application, by Bradshaw, Proctor, and Haebler, of palaeographical methods to printed records is reckoned as another separate study, 'bibliography'. Despite the proper concern of palaeography for the observation of all letter forms, students are divided according to material and technique, and according to purpose–administrative or literary.

This subdivision of palaeography is unhelpful to the comparison of printing with other forms of reading matter. In consequence, the question, how and when alphabets of a form peculiar to printing were developed, cannot be answered precisely. For instance, on the calligraphic side, there are gaps

IN OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE SCRIPTS USED BY THE GENERATIONS IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE INVENTION OF TYPOGRAPHY. THE CONNEXIONS OF GOTHIC AND humanistic handwritings with inscribed, sculptured, and engraved letterings are not exactly known.

In spite of research into the origins of printing, no scientific introduction to the development of the scripts from which our English contemporary printing styles derive was available until the publication, two years ago [i.e. in 1935], of *Die Entstehung der Renaissanceschriften,* by Prof. Alfred Hessel, which followed up a short section in a valuable paper on the progress of palaeography read in 1918 by Dr P. Lehmann of Munich. But this recent work of Dr Hessel, though of great value, is brief, and it contains only two plates of illustrations. A representative collection of fascimiles of the humanistic book-hands in the several stages of their development has yet to be made.

Again, our knowledge of the script known as italic was, until recently, slighter even than our knowledge of the history of the more formal humanistic hands. Signor Vincenzo Federici's collection (published in 1933) of some hundred collotypes of the writings used in the Italian chanceries from the twelfth to the seventeenth century sheds welcome light upon the evolution of the only diplomatic hand which developed into a book script and later into a printing type. Dr Karl August Fink, who has been long at work on the pontificate of Martin V, has published among his Beiträge a thorough study of the palaeography of the papal brief, of which the first appeared in the *Römische Quartalschrift* in 1935.

So far as gothic is concerned, we are indebted to Professor Hessel more than to any other for showing that, in order to criticize the form of early types, it is necessary to see them in close relation to the hands used in contemporary written books. This sounds elementary until it is realized that, although the types used in the fifteenth century have long been related, in a general way, to the manuscript models, such study has not been close. To-day it remains incomplete, even in the department which has received most attention, i.e. German book typography, to which Professor Hessel himself made a significant contribution in his *Von der Schrift zum Druck* written in 1923. The thesis of this paper was developed by Doctors Crous and Kirchner, *Die gotischen Schriftarten* (1928); and, four years later, its implications were given further scientific precision in *Die Namen der gotischen Buchschriften* (1932) by Dr Carl Wehmer, who, though a trained palaeographer, is now [i.e. until the war] a member of the Incunabula Commission established by the German Government of 1925. Further connexions between the art of the scribe and that of the printer were elucidated by Fr. Bonaventura Kruitwagen in two long articles which appeared in *Het Boek* in 1935.

But, while these special studies acquaint us with the ancestry, on the calligraphic side, of early printing whether gothic or renaissance, they do not, by themselves, yield a sound basis for criticism. In order to be fair to writing and printing, however, we must know something of the other crafts which may have affected, simultaneously or successively, both calligraphy and typography.

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